

The
**WESTERN
MEDIA**

in Asia

Globalisation & Resistance

Jawid Laiq

Just World Trust
(JUST)

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© Just World Trust 1996
First print: October 1996

ISBN: 983-9861-05-0

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Printed by
Vinlin Press Sdn. Bhd.
No. 56, Jalan Radin Anum 1,
Bandar Baru Seri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur.

Preface

The *Western Media in Asia: Globalisation and Resistance*, is an insight into significant trends in reporting on Asian countries by leading media institutions within the region. These trends exhibit a slant targeting Asian countries especially for their alleged failure to uphold human rights. The media seem unable, in a number of cases, to break away from long-held perceptions of Asian governments and societies. As Edward Herman notes, “The Western media pretend to objectivity, but their sources, ideological biases, commercial affiliations, and the preconceptions on their main (home) audiences make this a huge fallacy. They serve dominant Western power interests. This has a profound effect on their treatment of human rights” [cited in *Human Wrongs*, Just World Trust (JUST), 1996] (forthcoming).

However, this study also shows how the media’s reporting on Asian countries is dictated, to a certain extent, by commercial interests, which are inherently linked to the cultural preferences of Asian audiences. There is also an element of restraint and accommodation when reporting on issues sensitive to governments and peoples in Asia.

Since the perception of millions of people, not only in Asia but also in the West, are formed by their reports on events in the region, it should be the concern of each and every individual to discover some of the facts and fallacies contained in their coverage.

Jawid Laiq, who was awarded a JUST Fellowship in October 1995, has done an excellent job, in exposing some of the key agendas and motivations that drive the media to report what they do in the way they choose.

1 June 1996

Sanen Marshall
Co-ordinator (Fellowships and Publications)
Just World Trust (JUST)

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Trustees of the Just World Trust (JUST), Penang, for the JUST Research Fellowship which enabled me to work on this monograph. I am particularly appreciative of the generous encouragement and useful insights given to me by Mr S.M. Mohd. Idris, Chairman of JUST, and Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Director of JUST. I am also thankful to all the members of the JUST office in Penang for their help and hospitality – Mr Ghazalli Yasin, Mr Sanen Marshall, Miss Rosmah Ismail, Miss Nur Saleena Fazal and Mr Kalispran. I would also like to thank Mr Ramli Samad at the Library of the Science University of Malaysia, Penang.

February 1996

Jawid Laiq

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I Media Battles

The power, reach and capacity to misinform minds and cultures on a massive scale by ideologically monotheistic and technologically carnivorous media empires was feared and largely foreseen in the 1970s by prescient organisations and figures who were concerned about the impact of the increasingly globalised and commercialised Western media on poorer and less powerful societies with their own distinct and ancient cultures and customs.

These concerns were voiced and sought to be countered most prominently by two inter-governmental organisations, the Non-Aligned Movement and UNESCO, which germinated the idea for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), epitomised by the 1980 Report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, which was wishfully titled, *Many Voices, One World*.

It also came to be known as the *MacBride Report*, named after Sean MacBride, the human rights activist who headed the 16-member commission set up by Unesco in 1977 “to study the totality of communication problems in modern societies”. MacBride was a person of independent convictions who had as a young man participated in the Irish War of Independence and was later to hold the unique distinction of winning both the Nobel Peace Prize (1974) and the Lenin Peace Prize (1977). He was also a founder member and Chairman of Amnesty International from 1961 to 1974.

Some of the concerns and fears voiced by UNESCO and the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s have materialised more forcefully than envisaged and in forms which were not forecast. Some other concerns

have been overtaken by political, economic and cultural twists which were not that visible in the 1970s.

One of the most significant points of reference of the *MacBride Report* was the concentration of media control in the hands of a few transnational corporations, as noted in the following passage: “We can sum up by stating that in the communication industry there is a relatively small number of predominant corporations which integrate all aspects of production and distribution, which are based in the leading developed countries and which have become transnational in their operations. Concentration of resources and infrastructures is not only a growing trend, but also a worrying phenomenon which may adversely affect the freedom and democratisation of communication. Concentration and transnationalisation are the consequences, perhaps inevitable, of the interdependence of various technologies and various media, the high costs of research and development, and the ability of the most powerful firms to penetrate any market. The trends have their counterparts in many industries; but communication is not an industry like any other. Transnational corporations have a special responsibility in today’s world, for, given that societies are heavily dependent upon them for the provision of information, they are part of the structure that fosters the development of economic and social models, as well as uniformity in consumer behaviour unsuitable to many local environments.”¹

The expansion and centralised control of media empires has grown at a dizzying pace to gargantuan sizes. In September 1995, Time Warner, the second biggest communication corporation in the world, announced its decision to combine with another American giant, Turner Broadcasting System, which operates the worldwide CNN television network, to emerge as the largest communication, information and entertainment empire in the world, beating Walt Disney/Capital Cities/ABC to second place. Disney had decided on 31 July 1995 to buy Capital Cities/ABC. Disney’s takeover of Capital Cities which owns the ABC TV and radio broadcast network precipitated Time Warner’s move to acquire Turner Broadcasting. Time Warner with its latest acquisition will have annual sales of around US\$18.7 billion, bigger than the US\$16.4 billion annual sales resulting from Disney’s takeover of Capital Cities².

Both these mergers show that communication companies have leaped towards worldwide ownership and control of every aspect of the

communication process from production to distribution and every channel of information and entertainment from movie production studios, TV production facilities, information technology systems, news collection networks and commissioned authors to satellite and cable TV transmission systems, newspapers and magazines, book publishing and access to computer internets.

On 1 August 1995, CBS, another major American TV and radio network, agreed to be taken over by Westinghouse Electric for US\$5.4 billion while a third major American TV and radio network, NBC, is already owned by General Electric, which is a major defence contractor and one of the world's biggest producers of power generation equipment, electrical systems and jet engines for aircraft. Since 1941, General Electric has had five convictions for crimes including conspiracy (twice), fraud and tax evasion.³ Transnational industrial corporations like General Electric have realised the worth of communications networks both as profit centres and as strategic allies for influencing public opinion, however indirectly. Advertisers, consumers, TV and radio audiences, newspaper and magazine readers are faced with the possible prospect of having little choice except to become captives of these huge conglomerates, though this has not always happened for reasons which are explained later.

Supporters of these communication supermarkets argue that consumers are cruising down an "information superhighway" with infinite and varied choices. But quite the opposite seems to be happening. There are many more media outlets but they provide canned news from the same sources. For instance, newspapers all over the world, have reduced the number of their own foreign correspondents and increasingly rely on big news agencies such as Reuter and Associated Press (AP). Reuter also owns Visnews and partly owns WTN, both big television news agencies, which are major providers of televised news clips to TV stations all over the world. In 1945, more than 80 per cent of US media outlets were independent. In 1994, just 23 corporations owned more than 80 per cent of media outlets in the US⁴.

Democratic and individual choice has been short-circuited by these concentrations of corporate power effectively aided and abetted by their governments. The MacBride Commission, then actively supported by UNESCO and the Non-Aligned Movement, had sought to keep alive the

embers of democratic choice in the sphere of communication and information but in a classic piece of disinformation was accused by the US and British governments of trying to impose censorship and control on the media. The US government officially withdrew from UNESCO in December 1984, followed a year later, by the British government. The Singapore government, then a compatriot of the US and Britain, also walked out of UNESCO.

Part IV of the *MacBride Report's* recommendations was on 'Democratisation of communication'. Recommendation 58 in Part IV succinctly sought measures to remove obstacles in the way of democratisation of communication. Recommendation 58 stated that "Effective legal measures should be designed to: (a) limit the process of concentration and monopolisation; (b) circumscribe the action of multinationals by requiring them to comply with specific criteria and conditions defined by national legislation and development policies; (c) reverse trends to reduce the number of decision-makers at a time when the media's public is growing larger and the impact of communication is increasing; (d) reduce the influence of advertising upon editorial policy and broadcast programming; (e) seek and improve models which would ensure greater independence and autonomy of the media concerning their management and editorial policy, whether these media are under private, public or government ownership". ..

The possible dangers posed to India and other countries of the Third World by the entry of Western-dominated media giants is vividly portrayed by a prominent Indian jurist, V.R. Krishna Iyer: "Never forget that powerful media are often the propagandist fronts of industrial tycoons. Giant firms, especially in consumer industries, mount expensive advertising campaigns as victory belongs to those who dazzle the consumer the most. Sex and other appetisers are used to win markets. The primary motivation of free-booter enterprises, in our capitalist globorama, is maximising money making thro' business skulduggery. Investments in politicians and in the media owners is part of business and success goes to those who have under their control mind manufacturing, opinion manipulating and psychic tampering thro' media, print and electronic. Calvin Coolidge long ago said: 'The business of America is business'. . . In practical terms, the informa-

tion-communication operation is a catalytic converter used by the multinational corporations to drug the Third World into the spell of willing victimisation”⁵.

The drugging effect of television in particular is further explained by an Indian sociologist, Darshan Singh Maini. No other media outlet can compete with television in its assault on the senses, on the mind and on the imagination. The commercialisation of television with its umbilical connection to the advertising industry has reduced it to offering great doses of visual gimmickry and false emotions, subjecting the popular mind, particularly the child mind, to a compulsive addiction to attractive trash. TV can become a “brain chocolate” for children, though it can also serve as a great educator if it transmits intriguing and sensitive programmes.

The commercial push for high audience ratings usually leads to thoughtful and complex programmes being cast aside in favour of entertaining and populist programming in the West as also in many other areas of the world. Some of these populist programmes can have a political message of mass emotional arousal of racist or sectarian tendencies. Maini provides the example of the screening by Doordarshan, the government-owned and controlled TV network in India, of popular versions of the Hindu religious epics which helped create a militant Hindu consciousness which was exploited by neo-fascist Hindu political groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), leading in turn to a “carnival of communal frenzy” of attacks against the Muslim minority in India.

As Maini observes, “This should give us an idea of the power of the ‘telly’ to invade the nervous system and destroy the moral defences of man. It also destroys the imagination of adjustment, accommodation and resilience. It is thus that all fundamentalisms and fascisms are born”.

Television has been far more widely used to arouse fascist male sexual fantasies by transmitting nasty and violent sexual messages, driven again by the commercial and advertising drive. Maini explains: “I have not touched so far on TV’s most powerful appeal, that of sexual excitement and erotic fantasies. It is today the single biggest purveyor of voyeurism or peep-hole sex. A titillation industry, in short. Combined with sadism, and even with pure terror, it has a tendency to degenerate into the pit of evil. In glorifying sexual violence, and in the abuse of the female body, it sets up obsessive images. The ‘idiot box’ turns into a whore for the dreaming youth, and a

proxy for the aged. Its role in the promotion of ‘evil sexuality’ is now widely recognised. So the magic that opens up the universe for us is at the same time a mischief machine”⁶.

J. Richard Munro, a former Co-Chairman of Time Warner, the American media giant, does not regard TV and the electronic media as mischief machines. According to Munro, “The true magic of the new machines is not so much in the engineering or the design of the hardware as in the capabilities and capacities it creates for software. With this software, a free market of the human mind is coming into existence, a market for images, information and entertainment unconstrained by physical frontiers or ideological boundaries. And more often than not, the choices people make involve American software. The medium may be made in Korea or Japan or Taiwan, but the message is made in the USA”.

Munro rejects the premise that people are lured to buy American cultural produce by the seductive power of “glitzy, glittering junk”. He claims: “Today the best of America’s publications, films, programming and videos are as good or better than those produced by any other country. And we produce more quality products than they ever hope to. That’s why they’ve been so interested in buying American media and entertainment properties. But there’s another reason besides quality that explains the demand for our products, a deeper cause, an explanation that drives to the heart of so-called American cultural imperialism.

“All over the globe people associate the American style with a way of existence that to one degree or another they wish to share in. The freedom they want is the freedom they see embodied in the images and idiom of America—an idiom that is optimistic and democratic, with abiding faith in the ability of people to decide for themselves in small things as well as large”⁷.

There has been resistance to the images sought to be sold around the world by the Americans. Nations across the globe have tried to restrict foreign programmes, particularly American TV serials and Hollywood films, from appearing on their domestic TV channels. The European Union (EU), egged on by the French, has carried on a long battle to try and stipulate that at least 51 per cent of all TV programmes in member nations are of European origin. French law requires that 60 per cent of all TV programming in France be produced by companies within the EU and that half of

this total, or 30 per cent, be produced by French companies. Canada restricts foreign investment in publishing, TV and radio broadcasting, and cable TV.

With the advent of satellite TV for which the skies are open, some countries, including Malaysia, Singapore and China, have prevented transmissions from the sky from reaching the ground by legally restricting private individuals from owning or setting up their own satellite receiver dishes. India dithered about how to deal with foreign (and domestic) satellite broadcasts and has by default allowed satellite channels to be viewed by any Indian family willing to pay a nominal fee to one of the 60,000 unlicensed private neighbourhood operators who put up a large dish and supply the neighbourhood through cables with satellite programmes.⁸ These small cable operators were gradually being bought over by a few big Indian companies in 1995.

Cable-satellite TV has not resulted in the Indian viewer being overwhelmed by a flood of foreign programmes. Most Indian viewers have shown their marked preference for Indian programmes broadcast by Indian companies using foreign-owned satellite networks. The most popular of these Indian companies is Zee TV. Most of Zee TV's programmes are in Hindi, India's national language, and are racy and bold. Even 'The Bold and the Beautiful', the sexy American TV serial, broadcast to India on another channel by Rupert Murdoch's Star TV network, cannot compete with the sauciness of Indian serials. Zee TV is so popular that Star TV has bought a 50 per cent stake in it.

The most popular channels in India, however, are the ones controlled by Doordarshan, which remains a government department and transmits its programmes through both terrestrial and satellite channels. Most rural viewers do not have access to cable-satellite TV and, more significantly, Doordarshan regularly broadcasts films and serials produced by 'Bollywood', the Bombay film industry, which excels Hollywood in churning out violent and vulgar fantasies. As mentioned earlier, Doordarshan has also broadcast a series of popular religious epics which have had violent political repercussions.

Even in the cosmopolitan colony of Hongkong, the programme that achieved some of the highest audience ratings in 1993 was 'Pao, the Judge', a Cantonese-dubbed drama series from Taiwan about an honourable judge

in 19th century China. This and other locally-oriented programmes produced and broadcast by TVB, a Hongkong Chinese company, have led to TVB stealing a long march over Star and other Western-controlled companies in Hongkong and in the region. TVB with its vast archive of Chinese period dramas and variety shows has expanded into Taiwan and to Chinese communities all over Southeast Asia, and looks set to move into the southern areas of mainland China. Its Vietnamese dubbed dramas are also gaining popularity in Vietnam. Western media conglomerates were attempting to buy into TVB but were being resisted by the local owners and management⁹.

Munro's thesis has been disproved by millions of Indians, Chinese and Southeast Asians deciding for themselves that they are not interested in watching alien idioms and images of American or European origin.

In another sphere, the resistance to Western programming has been so strong that Murdoch's worldwide network, News Corp, has been forced to eat humble pie at the Chinese government's banquet. Murdoch challenged the Beijing leadership in September 1993 by rashly declaring that satellite broadcasting and the information age posed an "unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere". Just six weeks earlier, Murdoch's News Corp had acquired 64 per cent control of the Star TV network which beams into China and into many other Asian countries.

A month after Murdoch's declaration, China banned the private ownership of satellite dishes, largely cutting off Star's occasionally offensive programmes. With access to the large Chinese market (the number of TV sets had grown to 230 million at the end of 1992 from 27 million a decade earlier) cut off, Murdoch had to retreat. He dropped BBC TV news transmissions to China to placate Beijing and sold control of the Hongkong daily newspaper, *South China Morning Post*, which was noted to be close to the British colonial establishment. After a wait of almost two years, Murdoch has been allowed to set up business ventures in China but only after he has in effect self-censored Star programmes beamed into China¹⁰.

The obvious truth to emerge from these media battles is that the media has to be culture specific and sensitive to local cultural and political concerns if it wishes to attract bigger audiences of viewers and readers.

II Is the Western Media Sensitive to Asian Concerns?

How sensitive is the Western media to Asian concerns and interests? The Western news media claims to be fair, balanced and free in its reports and comments on world news events. It summarily rejects allegations of bias, prejudice, sensationalism, trivialisation and selectivity. These claims and allegations were tested by surveying reports and comments on some recent important news events which took place in Asia. (Asia here refers to East, Southeast and South Asia and does not refer to West and to Central Asia.) The print media is the most open to careful documentation. Five publications controlled by Western interests, with a wide international circulation in Asia and around the globe, and reputed to be serious and well regarded journals, were surveyed. These were: *International Herald Tribune (IHT)*, *Time* magazine (Asia edition), *The Economist*, *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)* and *Asiaweek*.

IHT is a daily newspaper except for Sundays. The other four are weekly news magazines. *IHT* is owned jointly by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, two of the most highly regarded national newspapers in the United States. It regularly publishes reports and comments from those two newspapers and also from *The Los Angeles Times*. It is printed in the same format from 12 major cities around the world. *Time* is owned by Time Warner which recently decided to merge with Turner Broadcasting to regain its position as the biggest media empire in the world. *Time* is published in several editions around the world. *The Economist* is published from London and is owned by *The Financial Times*, a British daily newspaper printed from several major business cities. *The Financial Times* is compulsive reading for British and European financial and stock market interests.

The largest slice of *The Economist's* circulation is in the United States. *FEER* is Hongkong-based but owned by the major New York firm of Wall Street market and financial analysts, Dow Jones. *Asiaweek* is also Hongkong-based. It is owned by *Time* magazine which is part of the Time Warner media empire.

The news events surveyed were: the Beijing World Conference on Women and the accompanying NGO forum from 30 August to 15 September 1995; the Kobe earthquake on 17 January 1995 and the terrorist gas attack in Tokyo on 20 March 1995 and their aftermath; the flogging sentence for vandalism imposed by Singapore on American teenager Michael Fay on 3 March 1994 and carried out on 5 May 1994; the restrictions imposed on Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, beginning with the official ban on her novel, *Lajja* (Shame), in July 1993 and the subsequent controversy.

The Women's Conference in Beijing and the accompanying NGO forum (30 August to 15 September 1995)

The Women's Conference in Beijing, which began on 4 September, was preceded by the women's forum attended by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from all over the world. The NGO forum began on 30 August at Huairou, 50 kilometres from Beijing, and continued till 15 September which was also the final day of the official Women's Conference organised by the UN.

International Herald Tribune (*IHT*) provided almost daily coverage of the forum and the Conference on its news pages, often giving front page treatment to events related to the Conference and NGO forum. Its editorial page kept up with the news pages and offered a large dose of comments.

The *IHT* set the tone for its coverage by news stories and comments published before the commencement of the NGO forum on 30 August. On 17 August, a news story titled, 'Housing, Yes, but It's Not the Huairou Hilton', suggested that the accommodation facilities for the NGO forum

participants were not quite adequate. A sharp reader responded in an ironic letter to the editor of the *IHT* on 31 August: “... But what excruciating suffering the participants of the meeting in Huairou will have to endure while they work for the improvement of the lot of their fellow sisters:

- “A maximum of five beds sharing one bath and one toilet – How many women throughout the world have neither bath nor toilet nor the hope of ever having them?

- “Each room has an electric fan. – How many homes in the developing world have no electricity at all to run a fan?

- “There is an IDD-line in every cluster of seven buildings. – How many women cannot even call locally to summon a doctor to make a house call to a seriously ill child?

- “There is a domestic telephone line on every other floor. – Wow, they may have to walk up or down a flight of stairs, while other women walk for miles just to get water from a well or a river...”

It was plain that the *IHT* was not concerned with the mundane problems of millions of women struggling through their lives of daily drudgery. It was greatly concerned about one woman, Hillary Clinton, and how she spent her time. Its first editorial comment about the Women’s Conference was not about any women’s issues but about how it would be a mistake for Hillary Clinton to visit China as “her presence could only indicate that the United States is not serious in its objections to China’s violations of human rights” (19-20 August).

The theme of US participation at the impending Conference was taken up in an editorial page article on 23 August by Geraldine Ferraro who had been chosen as a member of the official US delegation to the Conference. She concluded: “If the American delegation fails to go to Beijing, who wins? Not Harry Wu. (The Chinese American human rights campaigner then held by China.) Not women. Not the United States. Only China’s hard-liners will have reason to cheer”.

Harry Wu was released by the Chinese and arrived in San Francisco on 24 August, receiving a heroic write-up in the *IHT* of 26-27 August and in other US publications. Appropriately, on the same day, the *IHT* announced in its lead story on the top of its front page that Hillary Clinton would after all be attending the Women’s Conference in China. Right next

to the Hillary Clinton story, the *IHT* carried the news announcing the ending of Chinese naval manoeuvres near Taiwan but warning in the first paragraph of the news item that “China’s neighbors remain concerned about Beijing’s use of force to back its political aims throughout Asia”. Apart from a quote from a minor Taiwanese official, who in turn was reportedly quoting the Taiwanese Prime Minister, no other source was cited to support the apprehension conjured up among China’s neighbours in the first paragraph of the *IHT* news story.

It was yet another typical news item conveying Western fears about the rise of China as a great power and projecting these fears, without any basis, onto China’s Asian neighbours.

The ballyhoo surrounding Harry Wu was commented on by a reader in London in a letter to the editor: “The release of the human rights campaigner Harry Wu is laudable, as was his work to expose China’s appalling prison regime.

“But the West’s outcry is slightly risible, especially when Britain is introducing ‘boot camps’ and rapidly turning into a police state, and the United States puts people away for life for three minor offenses and then chains them up to smash rocks.

“There’s hope for reform in China. We, however, are regressing.” (*IHT*, 31 August).

The *IHT* was not interested in reporting on the hopeful side of China. It concentrated on the hard aspects of China. A front page story, titled, ‘For Chinese, a Woman’s Road Is a Hard One’. However, the ninth paragraph of the story did grudgingly admit that “China can claim that the condition of women has greatly improved since the Communists took over” (22 August). There was no reference to the obvious international context that women remain second-class citizens all over the world which includes the richest countries.

On 28 August, the *IHT* printed a story which was meant to be a curtain-raiser for the unofficial part of the Women’s Conference by acknowledging in its first paragraph that “women streamed into Beijing on Sunday hoping to focus on the real agenda: the plight of women worldwide”. Sadly, two of the three columns of the story focussed on US domestic political wrangling over the Conference and inevitably changed the international news agenda from the plight of the world’s women to Mr and Mrs Clinton’s

plight at the hands of backwoods Republicans in the US Congress.

Before the Conference had even begun, the *IHT*'s reporting agenda on the Conference had apparently been set. It was to be largely a mixture of reporting on China's nasty aspects, the Hillary Clinton extravaganza, human rights as narrowly perceived by the US State Department and the White House, and a heady concoction of frothy controversies. The substantial issues affecting half the world's population were to be blithely cast aside. The comments on the editorial pages of the *IHT* were to be as unbalanced as the reporting on the news pages.

Predictably, the front page report on the first day of the unofficial Conference had to begin on a controversial note:

“15,000 women cheered the opening of the Fourth World Conference on Women on Wednesday amid continuing controversies over visas, venues and Chinese restrictions on demonstrations by participants” (*IHT*, 31 August).

The editorial comment on 31 August was sober and serious.

It began: “Long before there was a dispute over who should join the American delegation to a conference on women, there was an international women's movement. Its growth is one of the striking social developments of recent decades”.

On the same page, more space was given to an opinion piece by a columnist who launched a parochial tirade against the Clintons and other assorted US politicians and against China's misogynist and undemocratic regime, while pretending to comment on the Women's Conference.

The 2-3 September issue of the *IHT* carried a front page photograph of two gagged Tibetan exiles silently protesting about Tibet's fate at the hands of China while a news story about women at the NGO forum denouncing war, militarisation and the huge military expenditures of the developed countries was relegated to page eight.

The headline of the front page story on 4 September betrayed the *IHT* news desk's disappointment that its wishes had not been fulfilled: ‘Women's Forum Leaders Back Off on Confrontation’. The story below the headline also clearly expressed its disappointment that the leaders of the NGO forum had avoided a clash with the Chinese authorities at Huairou. The story was almost juvenile in its despair at missing out on a good fight.

The official Women's Conference in Beijing began on 4 September

and was duly covered in the *IHT* of 5 September with the opening paragraph: “The battle to draft an international document promoting the rights and roles of women has reignited debates over abortion, the family and financial commitments as the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women opened here Monday”.

On 6 September, the *IHT* did itself proud in an orgy of wish fulfillment, portraying a Rambo-esque Hillary Clinton socking it to the evil Orientals. A large front page photograph of a self-satisfied and statuesque First Lady accompanied a story headlined: ‘Hillary Clinton Rebukes Beijing – Blunt Words About Rights’. Below the headline was a long story interspersing her speech at the Beijing Conference with idolatory phrases thrown in by the wide-eyed male reporter – “the wife of the US president made a stirring call for an end to the violation of women’s rights” and “Mrs Clinton’s criticism of Chinese policies fell on receptive ears”.

The assault on China continued the next day with the headline: ‘Center Stage and Side show, US Pans China on Rights’ (*IHT*, 7 September). The last paragraph of a small news item on the same page mentioned that the Chinese newspaper, *The People’s Daily*, had relegated Hillary Clinton’s “speech to a single line at the end of an inside-page report on the day’s events at the conference”.

The formal Chinese reaction came a day later on 8 September in the form of a considered rebuttal issued by Xinhua, the Chinese news agency, which claimed that Chinese women suffered relatively less discrimination than American women did. Among the points it made, was one on salary comparisons with men. In China, salaries of women in urban areas were 77 per cent that of men, compared to 59 per cent in the United States. The *IHT* of 9-10 September carried a short summary of the Chinese rebuttal in a single column on page eight.

On 12 September, the *IHT* unusually carried a ‘news analysis’ piece as its lead story on the front page. The piece, written by the same male reporter who had reported Hillary Clinton’s speech in glowing terms on 6 September, dived into some pop psychology in an attempt to decipher the complexities of Chinese behaviour at the Conference. The headline given to his ‘news analysis’ said it all: ‘China’s Heavy Hands – A Symbol of Insecurity’, followed by a second, smaller headline which said, ‘Treatment of Women at UN Gathering Points Up Differences in World View’. Right

next to the pop psychology was an attempt at subliminal advertising – a photograph of a towering woman member of the Danish Parliament with her hands on the shoulders of a frail Tibetan woman, ostensibly escorting the latter out of a news conference said to have been “disrupted by Chinese security officials at a hotel in Beijing”.

It seemed as if the *IHT* was bent on seeking out and highlighting minor disruptions which were barely noticed by the participants at the Conference and the NGO forum. A Malaysian journal, *Third World Resurgence* (Penang, No. 61/62), noted the sharp contrast in perceptions: “For many women who came from developing countries there were few complaints about the way the Conference was run. This is in contrast to the picture painted by the Western media agencies that the participants at the NGO forum were being constantly harassed by the Chinese and were having a frustrating time. In fact, according to 700 women’s groups that prepared an ‘Open Letter of Thanks’ to the hosts, an overwhelming number of meetings took place without any problems whatsoever, and the host country showed warm hospitality”.

On 13 September, the *IHT*, after a long famine, printed a serious and substantial piece from the Associated Press news agency on the important issues being examined by the delegates at the Conference. It reported that among the texts adopted by the Conference’s drafting committee were those on advancing peace, ending the increasing poverty of women, ensuring equal access for women in decision-making and calling for more financial resources to implement the international women’s Platform of Action. It also provided details of other issues being negotiated at the Conference, including debt relief for the poorest countries and a shift of funds from military spending to special needs.

On 14 September, the *IHT* reported that the Conference was stalled on sexual rights. On 16-17 September it reported that the Conference had ended on 15 September on a ‘Glimmer of New Hope’. The *IHT*’s reporting from Beijing ended on a positive note on 18 September: “The just completed United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women here put news emphasis on such issues as bank credit and war crimes, literacy and inheritance rights, domestic violence and parliamentary representation, lesbian rights and human rights.” It seemed a pity that all these positive developments had barely been reported on while the Conference had been

in progress.

On the *IHT*'s editorial page on 19 September, the World Bank blew its trumpet in an opinion piece by its vice president for human capital development who claimed that "The World Bank considers investing in women a key to its strategy to promote economic growth and reduce poverty". The piece also said that the World Bank was devoting large funds to improving the status of women in many sectors. There was, of course, not a word in this piece on the protests by several women's organisations at the Conference about how the World Bank's widespread imposition of structural adjustment policies was further pauperising the poorest women in the poorer countries.

The Economist (26 August) had made up its mind about the Women's Conference and China's role in it even before it had begun: "It is debatable whether gatherings like the United Nations' conference on women that starts in Beijing on September 4th achieve anything useful. China has done its best to remove any doubt, and make sure this one fails". The same editorial also advised Hillary Clinton that it would be wrong for her to go to the Conference as "The First Lady's presence would indeed surely be presented by the Chinese as a mark of approval from the mighty United States – but probably also be taken by them as a sign of American weakness in human rights and many other matters, whether economic, political or military".

The Economist's reporting from Huairou and Beijing started off, predictably, with a short story on the chaos, lack of facilities and "the tension between the Chinese hosts and the foreign organisers (which) is likely to dominate everything" (2 September).

The Economist of 9 September had to retract some of its earlier flip-pant forecasts. It admitted that "The conference has gone better than most expected". It also was constrained to report that the US First Lady's presence in Beijing was largely ignored by the Chinese: "It was striking that state television did not even mention her arrival in Beijing, the subject of so much diplomatic kerfuffle. Most Chinese newspapers also found it easy to ignore America's first lady".

In contrast to both *The Economist* and the *International Herald Tribune*, *Time*, *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *Asiaweek* were substantive, relatively balanced and sensitive yet critical in their coverage of the Women's

Conference. *Time's* cover story (11 September) on the Beijing women's summit was particularly striking in illustrating the diversity and range of women's concerns through telling quotes. Several quotes showed the contrast between the concerns of Western women and those of non-Western women.

Ela Bhatt of India's Self-Employed Women's Association told *Time*: "They ask for abortion rights; we ask for safe drinking water and basic health care". Khanam from Bangladesh said: "We don't wish to undermine their causes, but we have far more critical concerns than lesbian rights". Gita Sen, an Indian economist, drew attention to the rich-poor divide all over the world. She suggested that the elite women of New Delhi consume, pollute and exploit just as voraciously as the high-living rich of the West, and conversely, that the New York ghetto resident suffers just as much discrimination, poverty and insecurity as the Bombay slum dweller.

The *Time* cover story was accompanied by two hard-hitting articles which explored the social context of brutal practices such as female infanticide and abduction of teenaged girls in China and the burning of brides who cannot provide sufficient dowries in India. The two articles were carefully researched. They were hard-hitting without being sensational.

Far Eastern Economic Review's (*FEER*) cover story (7 September) on Asian women was aptly titled - 'Asia's women pay a disproportionately high price for the region's economic boom'. *FEER's* opinion columns were generally positive about the Chinese government's attempts to improve the condition of women in the face of traditional patriarchal prejudice. *FEER's* opinion column, 'Eye on Asia', argued that "China's record on the treatment of women is good" (14 September).

The main editorial in the 21 September issue of *FEER* was a scathing indictment of America's current China policy: "Above all, Washington must eliminate uncertainty about the bottom line and begin to treat China with the respect due to a nation of 1.2 billion people. Mr Clinton, alas, has from the start used China as a whipping boy to score domestic political points, and Hillary Clinton's on-again, off-again visit to Beijing for the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women was a perfect example".

Asiaweek of 22 September carried a succinct round-up of the Conference which showed the diversity of viewpoints even among Asian women. *Asiaweek* found that "Amid the diversity was an over-riding focus: chang-

ing age-old attitudes that lead policy-makers, bosses, husbands and fathers to discriminate against women”.

While this survey does not include a close look at the coverage of the Women’s Conference in Indian and Malaysian newspapers or magazines, it seems from a general glimpse of English language publications in the two countries that despite publishing reports from their own correspondents in Beijing, they relied far too often on reports from the major Western news agencies – AP, Reuter, AFP – for their day-to-day reportage of the Conference, thereby reproducing some of the biases and imbalances which appeared in the *IHT*. In contrast, *Time*, *FEER* and *Asiaweek* carried exclusive reports from their own specialised correspondents who seem to have been more sensitive in their coverage than the general run of reporters who cover any and every topic for the news agencies and for newspapers like the *IHT*.

The last word on reportage from the Conference should, perhaps, go to a letter to the editor of an Indian newspaper, *The Hindustan Times* (19 September), written by six delegates of an Indian women’s NGO who attended the Conference:

“On our return from the World NGO Forum on Women in Huairou we were shocked to see the Press reports of the forum released by international news agencies like Reuter and AP which were widely used by most Indian newspapers.

“These reports are biased, misleading and give an exaggerated importance to the attempts of an organised group of motivated China baiters who were committed to displaying their blatant hostility to the hosts rather than any commitment to the serious issues being discussed at the forum. In fact most delegations at the forum, particularly from the Third World, were very appreciative of the arrangements made for such a vast number of women as well as the courtesy and helpful attitude of the Chinese volunteers.

“We find it revealing that the reporting is so selective that one of the most important issues on which perhaps the widest consensus was established, namely opposition to structural adjustment policies and the economic blueprints of so-called development being imposed by the WTO and the G-7 countries, has been virtually blacked out in the said reports.

“Again, although the presence and speech of Mrs Clinton at the forum has been widely covered there is not a single report of the huge demonstration of women from all countries, against the hegemonic policies of

the US Government organised on the same day...

“The forum was a step forward in bringing issues of Third World women on to the global agenda. In spite of a concerted attempt to do so, the forum could not be hijacked. It is unfortunate that so many Indian newspapers carried reports from motivated agencies which give a contrary impression”.

The Kobe earthquake (17 January 1995), and the Tokyo gas attack (20 March 1995) and their aftermath

Japan is always on the brink of breakdown or disaster, if *Time* magazine's cover story headlines are to be believed. Some typical cover stories in 1994 and 1995 were headlined: ‘Missed Connection – Japan plays catch-up on the information highway’ (27 February 1995); ‘The Silvering of Japan – The country is growing old faster than any modern society. How will it handle the strain?’ (14 November 1994); ‘Brief Spring – Will Japan's reforms fade with Hosokawa?’ (18 April 1994). The deep foreboding in the headlines was also present in the content of the stories which seemed to be craving for the wish fulfillment that something major must go wrong with Japan.

According to the 27 February 1995 cover story, Japan, “The one-time technology leader is struggling in the race with the US down the information highway”. Another memorable sentence claimed that “on the information highway, Japan is stalled in the slow lane – lost in cyberspace”. The 14 November 1994 cover story painted a despairing picture of how the growing proportion of old people in Japan were threatening to overwhelm that nation's society and economy: “The consequences of the aging population have begun to affect the daily lives of large numbers of Japanese. The implications of the trend are frightening: it is likely to limit future economic growth, drive up health costs and stick future generations with the immense cost of overhauling an outdated social superstructure. The silvering of Japan has begun to rip apart the cohesiveness of families and place heavy emotional burdens on a society in which life is stressful as it is”.

Hidden within the story were examples of the great loyalty and care with which Japanese families continue to look after their elderly members, contradicting the editorial generalisations of social breakdown. The story conveniently failed to mention, even in passing, that the problems of aging populations were also afflicting scores of other developed countries in Western Europe and North America.

The 18 April 1994 story raised the spectre of a Japanese political system chronically incapable of rising above financial corruption and back-scratching cronyism. The story was set off by the imminent resignation of Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa eight months after he had assumed office as a crusading reformist leader.

When a real and uncontrollable disaster did strike Japan in the shape of the Kobe earthquake of 17 January 1995, the writing was almost gleeful. *Time's* lead paragraph describing the disaster said: "For a while, Japan believed it had made itself quakeproof. That nation's faith was shattered in 20 seconds, as a 7.2 tremor ravaged its sixth largest city, collapsing houses, wrecking roadways, igniting fires, destroying ports and leaving an estimated 5,000 people dead" (30 January 1995).

Hints of gloating over Japan's misfortune leaked out in stray sentences in the same story: "In recent times Japanese have come to believe in the power of science to guard them against the catastrophic thrashing... But when the ground shook under Kobe on Jan. 17, 1995, that faith suffered its own Richter shock, and Japanese confidence in their ability to outsmart nature lay in ruins".

Despite the gratuitous editorialising, the reporting from Kobe could not but help note the calm courage of the Japanese people: "Despite their misery, the survivors are quiet and stoical.. Occasionally there is weeping, but there is no hysteria, no yelling, and grief is muted, even private" (*Time*, 30 January).

The Economist was as gleeful as *Time* about Japan's failure to predict the Kobe earthquake and prevent quake damage. The first paragraph of *The Economist's* lead editorial commented:

"The Japanese had wired up the Pacific like an experimental rat; nonetheless, the quake arrived unannounced, and hit a part of Japan that had been considered relatively safe. They had invested billions of yen, and a great deal of ingenuity, in designing buildings that were supposed to stay

upright when the earth shook; many fell down anyway. Their rescue services had trained for years to deal with the aftermath of earthquakes. In spite of all this, more than 3,500 people died” (21 January). In the same issue, a report from Kobe openly contradicted some of the editorial comment: “Japan’s building code seems to have passed the Kobe test reasonably well. Most of the city’s newer blocks have remained upright”.

Exactly a year earlier, on 17 January 1994, Los Angeles was hit by an earthquake. An editorial in *The Economist* of 22 January 1994 did not express any glee over this disaster but sang a hymn of praise to the pioneering spirit of the American city of Los Angeles: “No other city has challenged nature so persistently – and, in general, so successfully That same spirit will, in time, be the solution to the city’s deeper economic and social problems All this creative destruction has sometimes left Los Angeles winded; but it has also left it on the frontier of technological change, product development and the creation of new industries At its best, looking forward, there is no more inspiring city in America”.

Two months after the Kobe earthquake, when poisonous Sarin gas was released in the Tokyo underground railway system by the Aum Supreme Truth sect, the Japanese government and people again displayed their stoicism and lack of hysteria. In contrast to the reactions to the Oklahoma bombing in the United States a month later, on 19 April 1995, the 20 March 1995 Tokyo gas attack was not followed in Japan by instant accusations and violent hysteria against Arab and Muslim innocents as was to happen in the US.

The cover story in *Time* (13 April) on the ‘Toxic Terror’ in Tokyo was straight in its reporting and avoided comment. The story had a companion piece on the worldwide implications of small groups of cultists getting hold of weapons of mass destruction. The piece proved to be prophetic in its analysis of violent sects in the US, a week before the Oklahoma bombing by a white militia group: “In the US, for example, there are many shadowy groups lurking – covert militias, survivalists, religious and political cults – with agendas of destruction and a newfound taste for exotic weapons. “You don’t hear much about them”, says Hugh Stephens of the University of Houston, “but these people are antigovernment and fearful. They are running around with arms and training for the millennium”.

The *IHT*’s reporting on the Tokyo gas attack was comprehensive and

careful. It avoided making crass generalisations about Japan and the Japanese, pointing out that big cities everywhere were vulnerable to terrorist attacks. It was *FEER* (25 May 1995) which indulged in some pop psychology to mark the 16 May arrest of Shoko Asahara, the leader of the sect which had organised the gas attack. *FEER*'S lead paragraph announced: "Shoko Asahara is behind bars, but his well armed cult's very existence points to some fundamental problems beneath the surface of the world's most affluent society". The final paragraph of the story concluded:

"As the Aum affair shows, the roots of those problems are embedded deep in the country's social structure. "Aum may not have succeeded in taking over the government", says a political analyst in Tokyo, "but they showed there is something seriously wrong with Japan's affluent society"."

An extremely rare piece of self-analysis in a British newspaper (*The Independent*, London, 13 April 1994), showed up the terrors and fantasies conjured by Western minds faced with a modern, affluent and highly organised society in Asia. The article said:

"Japan is not simply a country, it is also a non-specific condition of the Western mind, the blank screen on which we project our fantasies and terrors. Never mind the obvious material effects of the (Japanese) videos and the cameras; simple, immaterial fear and awe of the country's achievements can change our lives".

The article in *The Independent* also analysed the Western news stories which emanate from Japan: "The message of all such stories is: these guys (the Japanese) are unbelievably weird. And, when combined with the economic stories, the message becomes: these guys are unbelievably weird and very frightening. They are taking over the world and are absolutely nothing like us. Monstrous visions form in our minds".

As if to resurrect the monstrous image of Japan, *FEER* chose to fill the cover page and six of the inside pages of its 24 August 1995 issue with a recital of the horrors Japan had inflicted on its Asian neighbours during the wars of the 1930s and 1940s. The excuse for the cover story was the 50th anniversary of the end of "Japan's War in Asia".

The flogging sentence on American teenager Michael Fay by the Singapore Government (March to May 1994)

Between 4 and 20 April 1994, the *IHT* converted the flogging sentence imposed by a Singapore court on an American teenager for vandalism into a major world event rivalling the massacre of more than 200,000 persons in Rwanda in April-May 1994. In the 17 days from 4 to 20 April, there were nine editorial comments and opinion pieces in the *IHT*, in addition to several news stories on the Michael Fay case. Seven of the nine comments and opinions criticised the flogging sentence, often in language and tones which can only be described as hysterical. One columnist equated the flogging sentence of six strokes of the cane with the gruesome tortures inflicted by the Spanish Inquisition and the English Star Chamber in medieval times and by the Nazis in more recent times. He also called for a travel, investment and trade boycott of Singapore by American citizens and companies (*IHT*, 8 April). An *IHT* editorial comment on 14 April supported the call for US corporations to pressurise Singapore to cancel Fay's punishment. It even printed the names of some of the main US corporations and their chief executive officers who were to be called upon to press Singapore's President Ong Teng Cheong. The comment was titled, 'Assert American Values'.

It seems that, underlying the US media's hysteria, was revulsion at the thought of an all-American boy being flogged by Orientals. A number of non-American criminals have been flogged in Singapore and this form of cruel punishment has been opposed by human rights organisations for years. The *IHT* and most of the mainstream US media became aware of this form of punishment only when it involved an American boy.

The US media also seemed to be clueless about a society which had deliberately opted for social cohesion rather than individual licence.

Asiaweek and *FEER* felt no such revulsion. Both journals took a self-consciously 'Asian' view in their editorial comments about the Fay case. *FEER* commented: "What might have remained a minor case of criminal mischief was elevated to an international incident when President Clinton

declared the sentence “extreme” and had the US Embassy register a “strong protest” with the Singapore Government.

“We do not claim to be experts on punishment, but Mr Clinton too has some reason for modesty here. His willingness to comment publicly on a court decision betrays a remarkable preference for double standards over local sensitivities...

“The prevalence of violence and disorder (in American cities) may explain the sympathy among ordinary Americans for Singapore’s law-and-order policies: polls including one by *USA Today* showed a majority of Americans support the sentence given to Mr Fay. Perhaps Mr Clinton should attend to his own cities before he worries about ours” (31 March 1994).

Asiaweek commented: “The fascination that the Fay case has aroused in the West stems not just from ghoulishness. It is triggered also by an uneasy feeling that in many areas of life, society has simply given in to hooligans. Many of the offenders, even if caught, don’t receive any kind of punishment at all. Sometimes they get off after mounting outlandish defenses. In Asia, criminal sentences are reinforced by cultures that believe breaking the law not only threatens the public good but stains the family honor. A fundamental premise is never forgotten: if a person does wrong, he can expect to pay the price” (20 April 1994).

This comment could have implied that all is serene and peaceful on the Asian social scene. *Asiaweek* balanced that implication by doing a comprehensive cover story on the increasing assertiveness of young people in Asia and asked the question:

“Are Today’s Teenagers Too Wild?” The cover story was accompanied by a straight news report on the caning of Michael Fay which was finally carried out on 5 May (*Asiaweek*, 25 May 1994).

Time also carried a news item on the carrying out of the caning sentence and ended on a fitting note: “After Fay is released from Queenstown Remand Prison (Singapore) in June, he is expected to return to the US... He will find a country that is beset by crime and wondering whether Singapore’s harsh approach to punishment may be superior to Western respect for the rights of the accused – a question that will linger after Fay’s scars have healed” (16 May 1994). Fay was last heard of working as an attendant at an amusement park in Florida, having left his father’s home in Dayton, Ohio, after a quarrel.

The Taslima Nasreen saga (from July 1993)

Taslima Nasreen was transformed into an international figure by the Indian and Western media soon after *Lajja* (Shame), her novel in Bengali, was banned by the Bangladesh Government in July 1993 and an obscure group of Muslim clerics in Sylhet district of Bangladesh issued a death threat against her in September 1993. She further incensed devout groups of Muslims in Bangladesh in May 1994 by demanding that the *Quran* be amended. Later, she denied making such a demand. Before the publication of *Lajja* in February 1993, Taslima Nasreen was known only as a mediocre writer of novellas laced with heavy doses of sex and anti-religious rhetoric.

Lajja, a novel depicting the harrowing experience of a Hindu minority family in Bangladesh immediately after the violent pogroms against the Muslim minority in India in December 1992 and January 1993, became a best-seller in the Indian state of West Bengal, especially after it was re-printed and publicised by fanatical Hindu political groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Paris (VHP), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the major Hindu right-wing political party. These very groups had played a major role in instigating the violence against Muslims in India in the months before *Lajja* was published.

The ban on *Lajja* in July 1993 and the death threats against Taslima Nasreen by some Muslim clerics made her an instant martyr and heroine in the eyes of the Indian media. Apart from a few exceptions, Hindu journalists and writers of all hues – right-wing, liberal, secular, leftist – built her up into a valiant Saint Joan being burned at the stake by Islamic demons. Bangladesh was portrayed as a country in the grip of Islamic fanatics.

Among the Indian newspapers and journals which went berserk about the Taslima Nasreen affair was, for instance, the supposedly liberal English language weekly magazine published from Calcutta, *Sunday*. Through 1993 and 1994, *Sunday* carried a number of stories on Taslima Nasreen, including a cover story in its 26 June 1994 issue which featured a section on 'Islam and Intolerance'. The piece was smugly self-congratulatory about the tolerance of Hindus in contrast to the "vengeance" of Muslims. It even

quoted, without any trace of irony, a leader of the BJP, the party which has been repeatedly involved in openly expressing its hate-Muslim ideology and which keeps harking back to medieval times. Sushma Swaraj, that BJP leader, was quoted as saying: "We are for freedom of expression. What is happening in Bangladesh should not happen in the 20th century".

The same piece ingratiatingly attempted to establish a cosy bond between tolerant Hindus and Westerners in their joint crusade against vengeful Muslims: "Over the last decade, Hindus have come to believe that their religion, with its tradition of tolerance, has much in common with the Western tradition of free speech. Islam, on the other hand, is seen as repressive and almost medieval in its approach".

In the case of Taslima Nasreen, the Western media seems to have been led by the furore in the Indian media, into canonising her as an apostle of literary freedom and exhibiting a yawning gap in its understanding of cultures which have retained a strong sense of devotion for the divine. She was unknown in Western literary and media circles till English-language publications in India took up her cause for their own communal reasons.

The Times, London, commented in an editorial on 18 June 1994:

"...the conflict between free expression and Islamic absolutism is not peculiar to the Rushdie affair... Ms Nasreen and many lesser-known writers in Islamic countries are the victims of a conflict between two global cultures, which will not be easily resolved. It is vital that this battle should not be underestimated in the West". Shortly thereafter, *The Washington Post*, urged the United States and other nations to "make plain their concern for the safety of Ms Nasreen". Sweden came to her rescue by granting her a visa in August 1994. She has been living there and in Germany ever since.

The Western media continues to write occasional pieces about her but she has not received anything approaching the Western media attention lavished on Salman Rushdie over *The Satanic Verses*. *FEER*, after interviewing her in Stockholm, commented: "Cut off from her roots, she finds writing more difficult" (24 November 1994).

Meanwhile, Salman Rushdie has produced another major literary work, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which was indirectly banned by the Indian Government from September 1995 to February 1996 through the stratagem of invoking customs department restrictions. The ban was meant to placate the Bombay-based Hindu extremist leader, Bal Thackeray, who has been

caricatured and implicated in the Bombay anti-Muslim riots of January 1993 by Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The ban on Rushdie's latest book, tellingly, evoked only mild and meek criticism in the Indian media, especially when compared to the hysteria whipped up by Indian journalists over freedom of expression for Taslima Nasreen. The Western media largely ignored this latest restriction on Salman Rushdie's freedom of expression; Muslims were not in focus this time.

III Implications

Sections I and II of this paper indicate that while there has been an undoubted trend towards media centralisation, concentration and globalisation, usually generated by US-controlled and owned corporations, there are also signs of clearly growing resistance in Asia to US-led media globalisation. (This resistance is also apparent within the European Union, especially spurred on by France.)

The resistance – and at times, outright rejection – in Asia to the globalisation or Americanisation of the media has taken many forms which vary nationally. Among these forms of resistance, there is one outstanding core of resistance which has emerged, in differing degree, in all the three regions of Asia covered by this paper – East, Southeast and South Asia.

The core of resistance is based on the cultural preferences of the great majorities of Asia's vast audiences of media viewers, listeners and readers who favour programmes, channels and journals which are locally oriented

in flavour, in context, in theme and in language. The neat paradox is that the free market forces, so forcefully espoused by their Western votaries, have been made to kowtow to popular Asian cultural preferences.

Dubbing a TV serial about encounters on a California beach from English into Hindi or into Cantonese no longer attracts or amuses mass audiences in India or Hongkong. The characters, the theme, the storyline, must all be local (national) to enthuse audiences in Asia. Without high audience ratings, TV channels in particular, with their high capital costs, cannot survive. Nobody advertises on an unwatched TV channel. This market principle also applies, though less intensively, to radio broadcasts and to the print media.

Media globalisation has been based on profitable balance sheets for Western corporations. Low audiences and lower profits are pushing Western media controllers and owners into seeking alliances or accommodation with Asian media companies which have strong local cultural connections, know-how and resources which cannot be matched by alien media organisations. Some Asian media groups have resisted the overtures by Western tycoons.

Among the successful Asian TV groups with high audience ratings which have resisted Western attempts to buy into them is the Hongkong Chinese company, TVB, with its huge archive of Chinese period dramas and variety shows. As mentioned earlier, TVB's programmes have become extremely popular among Chinese communities in East Asia and all over Southeast Asia. Its dramas dubbed in Vietnamese have gained popularity in Vietnam.

Indian urban viewers have been given easy and cheap access to Indian and foreign satellite TV channels through neighbourhood cable operators. Surveys of Indian TV audiences have shown that most Indian viewers have rejected Western channels and have overwhelmingly favoured Indian channels. Despite political animosities, it is also evident that Indian viewers prefer watching Pakistan TV's family drama serials rather than sexy American soap operas. Indian telecasts of Hindi films are far more popular in Pakistan than Hollywood dramas dished out by Murdoch's Star Movies.

In China, Murdoch's Star TV network surrendered to pressure from the Chinese government and dropped BBC TV news from the network and, seemingly in return, Murdoch's News Corp was awarded a joint ven-

ture with the official Communist Party newspaper, *The People's Daily*, in June 1995 ¹¹.

Government policies also kept out 'objectionable' Western TV programmes from Malaysian and Singaporean homes till 1995 by banning private satellite receiver dishes except in tourist hotels. During 1996, Malaysian homes will be legally able to receive satellite TV broadcasts but only from their own Measat satellite with its high frequency Ku-band. Malaysian receiver dishes will be restricted to the Ku-band, effectively cutting out Western TV programmes which are regarded as culturally offensive and which are broadcast on the low frequency C-band used by most satellites in the region. Doordarshan, the Indian Government's TV service, will also be using the Malaysian satellite ¹².

Western media groups are as interested in penetrating the Asian print media market as they are in TV channels and information technology. Their interest in the print media is not misplaced. For instance, a comprehensive Indian media survey published at the end of 1995, shows that in the five years, 1991 to 1995, the average increase per year in the urban Indian readership of daily newspapers was four and a half per cent compared to a three per cent annual rise in the number of urban TV viewers, despite the vast growth in the availability of Western and Indian satellite TV channels ¹³.

Indian newspaper owners and employees, academics and all the opposition political parties have so strongly opposed the entry of foreign media groups in the Indian print media market that the Indian government, which has recently opened many sectors of the Indian market to foreign investors, has been compelled to continue its policy (set in 1955 and 1956) of keeping foreign investors and publishers out of the print media, though not out of book publishing.

Unless the Western media demonstrates its sensitivity to the cultural and political concerns of Asian nations, it is likely to be increasingly ignored by Asian audiences. The survey of some Western journals in Section II of this paper indicates that the two Hongkong-based journals, *FEER* and *Asiaweek*, which have a high proportion of their readerships within Asia, are making a conscious attempt to express Asian concerns, particularly in their editorial comments and opinion columns. The Asia edition of *Time* also appears to be sensitising itself to Asian mores when reporting on

Asian countries. These three journals seem to have realised that to retain even their limited readerships in the large Asian market, they must curb their latent tendencies to ride rough-shod over Asian sensibilities.

In one Asian sphere, *Time* and *FEER* have clearly failed to curb their parochial tendencies. This is in their comments and reports on Japan which far too often show a peculiarly Western mix of envy and fear of the only fully developed industrial and commercial power in the non-Western world. (*Time* and *FEER* do not have to bother themselves about Japanese readers as so few read English language journals.)

IHT and *The Economist* have shown no inclination to widen their narrow, 'Amero-centric' or Anglo-centric mental horizons and rise above a tendency to be supercilious and niggardly in their comments and reports on Asia; their market share of Asian readers is very limited.

The salient point which emerges is that Asian audiences and governments – with some exceptions – are confident and secure enough to rebuff Western media corporations because of the growing strength and dynamism of their economies. Conversely, Asian audiences and governments continue to be wooed by Western corporations, despite rebuffs, due to the inherent attractions of their growing economies and markets.

Endnotes

- 1 See *MacBride Report*, p.111. The recommendations of the *MacBride Report* and other important documents covering the movement for the New World Information and Communication Order or NWICO are collated in a very useful source book by Traber, Michael and Nordenstreng, Kaarle (eds), *Few Voices, Many Worlds*, World Association for Christian Communication, London, 1992.
- 2 *International Herald Tribune*, Singapore, 31 August 1995, and *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, 18 September 1995.
- 3 *New Internationalist*, London, June 1994.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 V.R. Krishna Iyer, 'Gargantuan media and soft India' in *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 7 March 1995.

- 6 Darshan Singh Maini, 'Electronic media: Magic and the mischief' in *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 6 June 1995.
- 7 J. Richard Munro, 'Goodbye to Hollywood: Cultural Imperialism and the New Protectionism' in *Media and Values*, No 61, Winter 1993.
- 8 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hongkong, 15 December 1994.
- 9 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hongkong, 27 January 1994.
- 10 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hongkong, 22 June 1995.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 4 January 1996.
- 13 *Ibid.*

The Just Cause for a Just World

Just World Trust (JUST) is an international citizens' organisation established in 1992 which seeks to create public awareness about injustices within the existing global system. It also attempts to develop a deeper understanding of the struggle for social justice and human dignity at the global level which **JUST** believes should be guided by universal spiritual and moral values rooted in the oneness of God.

In furtherance of these objectives, **JUST** has undertaken a number of activities including conducting research, publishing books and monographs, organising conferences and seminars, networking with groups and individuals and participating in public campaigns.

JUST has friends and supporters in more than a 120 countries and has so far established Chapters in 17 of them.

Other Publications by JUST

Books

- Human Wrongs: a Reflection on Western Global Dominance and Its Impact upon Human Rights
- Dominance of the West over the Rest
- Just Viewpoints
- Peace Dividend? The Arms Trade in the Post Cold-War Era – Jennifer Mourin
- Human Rights and the New World Order – Chandra Muzaffar

Booklets

- The United Nations Sanctions Policy and International Law – Hans Köchler
- Human Rights in Asia: the Struggle for Human Dignity
- Let Bosnia Live
- The Just Cause

The Western Media in Asia: Globalisation and Resistance

is an insight into significant trends in reporting on Asian countries by leading media institutions within the region. These trends exhibit a slant targeting Asian countries especially for their alleged failure to uphold human rights. The media seem unable, in a number of cases to, break away from long-held perceptions of Asian governments and societies.

However, this study also shows how the media's reporting on Asian countries is dictated to a certain extent by commercial interests, which are inherently linked to the cultural preferences of Asian audiences. There is also an element of restraint and accommodation when reporting on issues sensitive to governments and peoples in Asia.

Since the perception of millions of people, not only in Asia but also in the West, are formed by their reports on events in the region, it should be the concern of each and every individual to discover some of the facts and fallacies contained in their coverage.

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ISBN: 983-9861-05-0

**JUST WORLD TRUST
(JUST)**